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Address

Prepared for
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Presented by Theodore O. Cron at the White House Briefing for the
Religious Alliance Against Pornography
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This was an address that I couldn't give and it was delivered instead by my personal assistant Theodore O. Cron at the White House Briefing for the Religious Alliance Against Pornography, in Washington, DC on November 13, 1986.

At the time that he did this, I was lying quadriplegic in the Bethesda Naval Medical Center waiting for surgery a few days later, which restored me to complete neurologic capability – but just a little less strong than I had been before the sudden onset of quadriplegia at the meeting of the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States in San Antonio just days before.

I was interested enough about the effects of pornography on children and young people that I wanted Ted Cron to give this talk, especially to that audience, even though I was not able to do so. He expressed my belief that many of us shared the same feelings and perspectives and pointed out that at Harvard's 350 Birthday, I had reminded the Cambridge audience that the first European settlers navigated their way across the Atlantic a full century before the invention of the quadrant and the spring wound clock. They had no technology to sail with, but they had human intuition. I raised the question back at Harvard whether or not we had too much technology, but less of the faith – a stern tenacious faith – that we so desperately need. Ted made it clear that I believed that we were confronting an issue, which was a test of our faith ... our faith as citizens...our faith as clergy and public health workers...and our faith as human beings. That issue is pornography. He went on to point out that whereas the public's concern formerly had been with book stores and movie theaters, but now the hucksters of pornography had invaded cable television, popular music, telephone communications, and the whole new field of home videos. Yet, we give pornography low priority in the overall scheme of public health concerns.

To ignore the evidence any longer would make a conscious decision not to see pornography as a clear and present danger to American public health.

Ted Cron highlighted the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography and their report and the work I had done on Pornography in reference to children, which culminated in testimony

before the Commission in June of 1985. From that came the “Surgeon General’s Workshop on Pornography and Public Health” held in June of 1986.

The report of my findings has already been expressed in the address found in this archive for June 22, 1986 presented to the Surgeon General’s Workshop on Pornography. I would only stress some things that I don’t believe were stressed enough in that previous address.

First, the participants agreed that, “Children and adolescents who participated in the production of pornography experienced adverse, enduring effects.”

Second, “The prolonged use of pornography increases beliefs that less common sexual practices are more common.” The same conclusion occurs when we talk about violence and other acts of anti-social behavior.

The third consensus statement said, “Pornography that portrays sexual aggression as pleasurable for the victim increases the acceptance of the use of coercion in sexual relations”. This kind of pornography would appear to be the cause for much of the rape that occurs today. Impressionable males – many of them still in adolescence – seeing this material begin to believe that women like to be hurt. – they like to be humiliated -- and forced to do thing they don’t want to do.

Fourth, “Acceptance of coercive sexuality appears to be related to sexual aggression”.

And finally, “In laboratory studies measuring short-term effects, exposure to violent pornography increases punitive behavior toward women”.

For all of these, I quoted experts in the field who had participated in the Surgeon General’s Workshop.

In short, Mr. Cron made it very clear that I believed that as the five consensus statements indicate, pornography does stimulate attitudes and behavior that does have gravely negative consequences for individuals and for society. At least the record is now much more clear and less ambiguous.

Ted also made it clear that our approach to pornography had nothing to do with the Citizen’s Rights under the First Amendment. Rather, we were concerned only with the scientific record regarding public speech or writing that may possibly endanger the life or diminish the well-being of any citizens. That’s the public health perspective.